

SNOHOMISH COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

Published January 2004

Smokey Point overpass project gets financial boost

The Washington state Transportation Improvement Board recently awarded a \$3 million grant toward a new 172nd Street NE bridge over I-5 at Smokey Point.

The money is the final chunk needed, putting a total of \$7 million into the piggy bank for the \$6.5 million project, which would create a six-lane bridge. Congestion from the old two-lane bridge has caused a high rate of accidents and limits growth in the area.

"This is the best news we could possibly imagine," said Becky Foster, owner of Bruce and Becky's Interiors in Marysville.

Business owners in the area already got promises of \$3 million from Congress, not yet officially approved; \$750,000 from Arlington and Marysville; \$227,000 from the state DOT; and \$10,000 from the Tulalip Tribes.

The new bridge could be built in about two years, said Ron Paananen, DOT's deputy regional administrator.

New bridge opens Dec. 2

Okanogan's new Oak Street bridge will open the afternoon of Dec. 2.

For more on Okanogan's will open to public traffic as soon as the ceremony ends, said city clerk Ralph Malone.

Page A14

City officials and prime contractor Mowat Construction, Woodinville, had targeted Nov. 25 as a possible opening date. But cold temperatures delayed final work, including pavement painting, said Malone.

Okanogan Chamber of Commerce is running a drawing to determine who will be the first to cross the bridge in an official capacity. Tickets are available from various merchants.

The Oak Street bridge replacement project has been in the works since the mid-1990s. Construction began in April with Mowat Construction Co., Woodinville, as prime contractor.

Mowat officials indicated from the start that they intended to complete the bridge by late November or early December even though the contract period runs until Dec. 30.

Published on HeraldNet.com: 11/29/03

Cooperative spirit helps drive financing for new I-5 overpass

By Scott Morris
Herald Writer

ARLINGTON -- Earlier this year, local and state elected officials and business leaders were frustrated -- some with each other -- about how a new interchange project at Smokey Point had been dropped from the state's transportation funding package.

Those community leaders are now singing a more harmonious tune.

They got the green light to widen the I-5 overpass on 172nd Street NE to six lanes earlier this week, thanks in large part to the cooperative spirit they had forged.

The group lobbied legislators, wrote grants and even persuaded local businesses to consider taxing themselves.

Those efforts led to \$3 million in federal transportation money, another \$3 million in a state transportation grant, \$750,000 from Arlington and Marysville, and smaller amounts from other contributors.

"I think one of the key factors we did right was we got a bunch of players involved, not just the city," Arlington City Councilman Ryan Larsen said.

The group included elected officials and staff from Arlington and Marysville; business people; county, state and federal legislators; and the Tulalip Tribes.

Many of those entities had proposed other overpass projects to the south.

"It's much better than fighting or arguing," Arlington Councilwoman Sally Lien said.

"I think the finger-pointing went away when we discovered how we're small stuff compared to this enormous, enormous task of getting rid of the bottleneck in Everett."

Ryan Larsen's brother, U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen, D-Wash., also credited the local impetus, especially from business owners.

"The reason we got any money to get started was local people like Becky Foster, Gigi Burke and others who pushed me to see if there was any federal money available," Rick Larsen said.

Ryan Larsen said Arlington City Councilman Oliver Smith played a key role as well.

The overpass is the first phase of a bigger project to construct a full cloverleaf interchange. For now, building a wider bridge within the next two years should help alleviate traffic tie-ups in Smokey Point.

Lien said city engineer Paul Richart guided the group through the state grant process.

"I think perhaps to a certain extent there's a lot of gratification to be able to do it ourselves," Lien said. "It's not our money, but we found it ourselves."

Reporter Scott Morris:
425-339-3292 or
smorris@heraldnet.com.



Roundabouts touted for Chamber Way congestion

TRAFFIC WOES: Chehalis seeks funding to alleviate bottlenecks and vehicle backups over the Interstate 5 overpass at the traffic lights on exit 79

By Dan McClurg
The Chronicle

Traffic congestion on Chamber of Commerce Way over Interstate 5 is likely to remain a headache of bottlenecks and backed up vehicles for the time being, Public Works Director Jim Nichols said Monday.

Chehalis was recently denied a state Transportation Improvement Board grant for installing roundabouts on the heavily trafficked road, but Nichols said his department will apply for the grant again next year.

"We're enjoying a very cooperative project with (the Department of Transportation)," he said at the Chehalis City Council meeting Monday. "They're really taking the project seriously and wanting to go forward."

The hitch, of course, is money. Nichols said roundabouts, which eliminate the problem of backups at traffic signals, would be the cheapest way to



Gary J. Chisholm / The Chronicle

solve traffic problems on Chamber Way for the longest period of time.

The other option, replacing the bridges and adding lanes in both directions, would cost upward of \$50 million. Planning and construction for roundabouts, however, would cost about \$4.7 million, Nichols said.

Another problem: Teaching people to use roundabouts.

"As you know, I support the idea of installing roundabouts," Chehalis City Councilor Wayne Galvin said. "But in heavy traffic, you can get locked into that left lane and go around several

Above, as cars zoom past him, Gordon Norquist, a surveyor with the Washington State Department of Transportation uses a transit to survey the State Street-Chamber Way intersection in Chehalis Monday afternoon.

At left, Norquist takes measurements to prepare for upcoming traffic revisions in Chehalis.

times before you can get out of it."

Nichols explained that roundabouts on Chamber Way would be just one lane, which would eliminate the problem of getting locked into one or the other lane. He also said the public works department hopes to set up mock roundabouts for local drivers to practice on.

Dan McClurg covers health and rural south and west Lewis County for The Chronicle. She may be reached at 807-8239, or by e-mail at dmcclurg@chronicle.com.



WEDNESDAY

December 17, 2003
Logged In: Don McGahuey



Local News - December 16, 2003

Plans call for widening Maple Street, adding sidewalks

By Marco Martinez, World staff writer

WENATCHEE - Improvements that would widen Maple Street and add sidewalks on both sides will be the topic of a Wednesday evening meeting at Foothills Middle School.

Work on the estimated \$1.9 million project is expected to begin in early spring, according to James Bartleson, project manager with Hammond Collier Wade Livingstone, the engineering firm hired by the city to design the improvements.

"The completed product is going to be a lot better for kids going to Foothills," Bartleson said Monday.

There are sections along Maple Street where there is no sidewalk on either side of the street. Sidewalks exist in the areas closest to Wenatchee and Western avenues.

Don McGahuey, city engineer, estimated about 25 percent of the road has sidewalk.

Improvement work will include widening the street so a middle turn lane can be added along Maple Street between Wenatchee and Western avenues, a little less than one mile, McGahuey said.

Bike lanes, storm drains and street lighting will also be added as part of the project, Bartleson said.

Widening the street to 44 feet will require the city to buy land from some private property owners along Maple Street.

Wednesday's meeting will include time for questions and drawings of the street project.

Roughly 80 percent of the project cost will be paid with funds from the state Transportation Improvement Board, McGahuey said. The city will pay for the rest of the work, with the money coming largely from the arterial street fund, he said.

The street work will be completed sometime in the fall and will require detours at times.

Similar improvement work has been done on Orchard Avenue, Ninth Street, Maiden Lane and the north section of Western Avenue in recent years.

Marco Martinez can be reached at 664-7146 or by e-mail at martinez@wenworld.com



Wednesday, December 24, 2003, 12:00 A.M. Pacific

Permission to reprint or copy this article/photo **must** be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

Drivers' relief just down the road

By Peyton Whitely

Times Snohomish County bureau

ARLINGTON — In less than 1½ years, the temper-blowing bottleneck at the Smokey Point interchange could be just a bad memory.

Money has been approved to widen the 172nd Street Northeast bridge over Interstate 5, the scene of notorious traffic backups as motorists maneuver over the two-lane road to get on the freeway.

The bridge has remained unchanged since it was built in 1968, even as the entire Smokey Point area of shopping plazas and other businesses was developed on the eastern edge of the freeway.

The plan is to place advertisements May 3 to seek bidders for the work, said Pat McCormick, an engineering manager for the state Department of Transportation. Work could start by about July.

"Our goal is to get it open by the end of 2004 or early 2005," McCormick said. "The desire is to get it open to traffic by the end of 2004.

"My bet is the spring of 2005."

That's still a fast schedule for a job that McCormick said he'd normally expect would take nine to 12 months. But such a pace could be possible with an aggressive contractor and good weather, he said.

And though the route will be open, the project likely won't be completed until probably the end of summer 2005, when access ramps, sidewalks, lighting and other finishing touches are to be done. Initially, the new bridge will have four or five lanes.

After more than 30 years of waiting, the job will culminate a long-standing goal of making it easier to drive from the Smokey Point area onto southbound I-5, the direction the vast majority of motorists who use the interchange travel.

As it is now, by about the middle of most afternoons, a milelong line of traffic is backed up in the westbound lanes of 172nd Street Northeast, or Highway 531, waiting to get into a left-turn pocket leading to I-5 that's big enough for about four cars.

The work to be done in the next year will significantly change that, although it's still only a first step.

"What this will do is give us the ultimate bridge," McCormick said of the proposed project. "This will give us two left-turn lanes so we can clear things out faster to the east."

This first step is expected to cost about \$6.5 million. It's part of a bigger planned interchange that would cost about \$29 million and include a sixth lane on the bridge, a park-and-ride lot and a loop ramp that would take traffic from westbound 172nd Street Northeast to southbound I-5, rather the left-turn lanes being put in now.

But that bigger job is dependent on more funding, which would likely come through a public vote, perhaps by next November. The rest of the work could be done by about 2008, McCormick said.

Until then, the \$6.5 million job will have to suffice, but he said it's a substantial change by itself.

That the work is being done at all is largely the result of a group of residents, businesses and political leaders called TRAP, or the Marysville-Arlington Transportation Relief Action Plan. The group overcame obstacles that included political setbacks and a poor economy, to push through financing and planning for the \$6.5 million job.

"They started turning over rocks to see what could be available," McCormick said.

Though some documents remain to be signed, the money will come from a variety of sources: About \$2.9 million has been approved by the state Transportation Improvement Board; about \$2 million to \$3 million is included in federal fiscal 2004 appropriations; a joint contribution of \$750,000 is being provided by the cities of Arlington and Marysville; and a \$100,000 contribution is being made by Snohomish County.

In addition, \$1.6 million could be raised through a proposed local-improvement district.

When the initial work is done, the change will mean there probably will be one through lane eastbound, one or two through lanes westbound and two left-turn lanes leading to southbound I-5.

Peyton Whitely: 206-464-2259 or pwhitely@seattletimes.com

Copyright © 2003 The Seattle Times Company

Published on HeraldNet.com: 1/3/04

GUEST EDITORIAL

A community joins to make a difference

The adage, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going," certainly holds true in the case of the obsolete overpass at I -5 and 172nd Street in North Snohomish County.

Finding our 40-year-old, \$26 million overpass once again dropped from the list of needed transportation improvements, a group of local businesspeople solicited help from a bipartisan group of elected officials. Out of meetings with Marysville Mayor Dave Weiser, Arlington Mayor Bob Kraski, County Council member John Koster and Arlington City Council member Oliver Smith, the TRAP coalition was formed.

TRAP (the Transportation Relief Action Plan) began with a bold request from the state Transportation Commission at its quarterly meeting in Everett. Our appeal was for the Department of Transportation to support an improvement of a smaller scale that would bring immediate relief to the congestion and allow economic development to proceed -- a project that would meld into the ultimate design.

To our delight, commission Chairman Aubrey Davis and the other commissioners instructed the DOT to explore our "Band-Aid" approach. The DOT took our suggestions and went the extra mile to propose phasing of the ultimate project. By constructing the six-lane bridge for \$6.5 million, we could get our safety and economic development issues solved for the near future. The only problem we now faced was finding \$6.5 million.

The TRAP coalition took our needs to U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen, Koster, and 12 state legislators representing this area. U.S. Sen. Patty Murray met with Kraski on the floor of the Senate in Washington, D.C., to review the notebook full of resolutions and grant requests we had prepared.

TRAP had coordinated support letters from County Executive Bob Drewel, the County Council, the cities of Marysville and Arlington, all three area Chambers of Commerce, Sheriff Rick Bart, the Lakewood and Arlington school districts and the Tulalip Tribes. We received letters from all four legislative districts representing North Snohomish County.

While many of the senators and representatives attended our strategy meetings, others worked behind the scenes in Washington D.C., and Olympia. Our thanks go to state Sens. Mary Margaret Haugen and Val Stevens, and to Reps. Dan Kristensen, Kirk Pearson, John McCoy, Barbara Bailey, John Lovick and Jean Berkey. With their help, the TRAP group now had access to federal, state, county and city staff to assist us in finding the money.

In about six months we have located more than the \$6.5 million needed. TRAP was advised to apply for a Transportation Improvement Board grant of almost \$3 million, which was approved just before Thanksgiving. Knowing that Congress had \$3 million waiting in a transportation bill, along with money from Arlington, Marysville, Snohomish County, the DOT and the Tulalip Tribes, we had an early Christmas.

A special thanks to Becky Foster, Ralph Krutsinger, Bill Binford, Steve Peiffle, Paul Richard and all the TRAP community members who dedicated countless hours and had the attitude that "we can get this problem solved."

The community now anxiously awaits President Bush's signature on the final \$3 million needed to start construction.

This has truly been an outstanding effort. It demonstrates that a group of citizens and businesspeople can sit down with local government leaders and combine their ideas to solve an otherwise unsolvable problem. This represents collaboration where personal interests and differences were set aside to jointly solve a common issue. It is government at its finest.

Gigi Burke and Harvey Eichenfield serve as co-chairs of the Marysville/Arlington Transportation Relief Action Plan coalition.